

14: Brant E-5 (1949-50) 1954 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4
Indians

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fund, which he had broached informally on past occasions, did not meet with enthusiasm, the headman suggested that the village be divided into territorial units, and that each unit be responsible for raising its own money for arms and for deciding on the custody of its weapons. He called for volunteers from the elders to take responsibility for soliciting funds from inhabitants of their respective areas.

The headman's speech was met with total silence for a time, followed by a great deal of whispered conversation among various small groups. At this point the eldest man in Tadagale, himself a retired headman and a relative of the present headman, exhorted, 'Speak out your thoughts. It is not good to keep things bottled up within yourselves.' The headman now told the group that as their representative he could do nothing unless they wished it.

As hushed conversations continued among the assembled villagers, the headman and elders proceeded to talk among themselves for several minutes. It was then and there decided that each household would be asked to contribute what it could afford; no fixed assessment would be levied. A household too poor to contribute to its unit fund would be expected to help in the event that an attack occurred. Since some elders objected to giving assistance to any unit which chose not to arm or could not afford to, it was decided that armed groups would not come to their aid. Now another call for volunteers to raise funds was made by the headman, and several elders offered their services. The headman asked them to make every effort to persuade people to contribute.

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If we may digress for a moment, this village meeting is instructive in showing how authority is exercised and decision making takes place in the community. The traditional emphasis upon the wisdom and authority of age is seen in the fact that only the elders spoke in the meeting, although the headman presumably called the meeting, in the first place, to mobilize village-wide support and tried to evoke expressions of opinion. An informant questioned later about the meeting said, 'It is not customary for the younger people to voice their opinions or take part in the discussion during a meeting. The elders do that.' The idea of a free give-and-take discussion is almost totally foreign to these peasants, who live but a few miles from Rangoon, a center of diffusion for western concepts and practices.

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In return to the hearing of the above described meeting on Indian-Burmese relations in the village. During the meeting the question arose whether the Indians would be asked to contribute to the fund for purchasing arms, to which the headman answered in the affirmative. At that point one man quipped, 'Of course they must contribute; they have thousands of rupees.' [The meeting was one concerned with attending the village Spring Festival.]

Two spokesmen for the Indians were present. The village headman explained to them that those who lived towards the northern end of the village would be included in a nearby unit for defense purposes, while the others could contribute their money directly to him. Then, half in jest, he said that each Indian household should give the cost of one gun. Somewhat irritated, one of the Indian spokesmen said that if need be he was willing to pay for five guns, but the question he wanted answered was who would have custody of the weapons. The headman was extremely hesitant to answer, and the Indians left the meeting without a definite answer.

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372. VILLAGE ELDERS IN CONCLAVE.

the horrors of barbarous war. At present brigandage is of very sporadic occurrence. Travellers are perfectly safe.

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Throughout Burma every man was liable to serve in war. He would have his own sabre and pike and would be provided with musket and ammunition, but no further accoutrements. Latterly the king's body-guards wore a sort of uniform (No. 9). Cannon are mentioned as early as 1350, and a century later, matchlocks were in use. Caesar Frederick in 1569 speaks of pikes and arquebuses and good cannon. When dis-

banded, the soldiers had to surrender their muskets, but numbers were smuggled away, to add to the rigour of the guerilla waged by brigands and the severity of the villagers' retaliation.

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The military leader is called *Bá*; the civil governor or minister of the king, *Wun*, which means a burden or trust. The former might be a young man, the latter but rarely so. Age and influence are almost synonymous in Burma. If the elders—headmen, *ladyt*—are agreed upon a thing, it is done. The village elders represent the fundamental substratum of government in Burma. They are consulted by the officials on matters affecting the people, whose natural, if unofficial,

disperse as quickly as it was recruited or else it might develop into a band under a regular leader (*Bá*) and become the scourge of the country, rapidly attacking points separated by days' journeys. Against such bands the villagers combine and keep guard; torches are ready for night alarms. But when the brigands are too strong, the villagers have no choice but to enter into league with them and pay blackmail if they would not experience



373. BURMAN OFFICIAL RECEIVING APPLICANTS.